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'TIME OUT' FOR CIVIL SOCIETY?

BICS' positions on the role of civil society in South-South cooperation with Africa

Discussion paper

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1 | Introduction

Government and private sector are both prominent players in South-South cooperation (SSC) between emerging powers and African countries, but civil society remains largely out of the picture. This feature of current SSC, especially visible in Sino-African cooperation, contrasts with the emphasis traditional western donors place on civil society as a crucial partner in fostering development. Multiple studies on relationships between donors and civil society organizations (CSOs) have been conducted (Scanteam, 2008; Pratt, 2009; Giffen and Judge, 2010; Hedman & McDonnell, 2011), but they tend to focus on donors that are member of the OECD's DAC, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Consequently our comprehension of emerging powers' interactions with CSOs in their partner countries remains limited. Examing this topic is important, now more than ever, because of emerging powers are scaling up their SSC. This discussion note briefly investigates how China, India and Brazil currently position civil society in their international cooperation with Africa. It then explores preliminary explanations for the lack of inclusion of African civil society, focusing in particular on the Sino-African relations.

2 | Civil society missing in action?

The recent economic and political rise of emerging powers has gone accompanied by their increasing **(re)investment[1] in South-South cooperation (SSC)** – cooperation between countries that consider themselves part of the global South. Figures on the scale of this (re)emerging cooperation are hard to get by: lack of transparency on the resource flows and conceptual discussions on the exact definitions of and relations between development aid, development assistance, development cooperation and South-South cooperation complicate estimates. One cautious attempt[2], using available figures on individual countries' development programmes, estimated the share of 2009 development co-operation flows of non-DAC countries to amount to roughly eight percent of global Official Development Assistance (ODA) (Zimmerman & Smith, 2011: 724). Another source concluded that the 25 countries with a South-South agenda (including countries such as Brazil, China, India, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa) accounted for about ten percent of overall development cooperation flows in 2009 (Bilal, 2012: 18). According to these estimates, the share of the BICS' development cooperation flows in the overall ODA flows should range somewhere between two percent (Zimmerman & Smith, 2011: 724) and three percent (Bilal, 2012: 18).

Figure-wise and in comparison to ODA the importance of this trend may seem modest. Still, over the past few years SSC has become the subject of unprecedented scholarly and political attention, and not without reason. Many scholars and policymakers consider this trend to have a **potentially**

1 Although the recent spurt of interest in 'new donors' or 'non-traditional donors' would suggest otherwise, South-South cooperation is in fact nothing new. An important predecessor or even founder of SSC has been the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM). Although officially established in 1961, the ideological foundation of the NAM was laid during the Bandung Conference in 1955.

2 This estimate took into account the 'official providers' of development co-operation from beyond DAC's membership, referring to sovereign countries and the transactions undertaken by their central, state or local government agencies, regardless of how they have raised the funds (e.g. taxation or loans from private sector). Outflows from multilateral organizations, private sector or NGO involvement have not been taken into account (Zimmerman & Smith, 2011: 723). The estimates also assume that figures from individual countries' development co-operation programs are consistent with the definition of ODA, which is in fact not a given at all. But other estimates are in the some range. The World Bank estimates that ODA-like flows and practices (which some refer to broadly as 'aid' as others don't) of BRIC countries add up to $3.9 billion in 2009, which is approximately 3% of total ODA.

game-changing impact on the power dynamics, actors and policies of development cooperation. Firstly because of its comprehensive nature, as SSC is a concept much broader than development aid or assistance. It refers to: "*the exchange of resources, personnel, technology, and knowledge between 'developing' countries – a loose definition that can cover almost any form of interaction from South-South foreign direct investment by Asian, African and South-American multinational firms, to diplomatic meetings and agreements, to the provision of technical experts*" (Mawdsley, 2012: 63). Secondly, because SSC adheres to a distinctively different set of principles and discours than the DAC-based development cooperation does. Thirdly, because, differences on conceptualization and exact estimates aside, there is an overall consensus about the fact that the visibility, presence and impact of SSC is on the rise and that Brazil, India, China and South Africa (BICS) are driving this trend.

In addition to a striking economic take-off, these emerging powers demonstrate a growing geopolitical (and sometimes also military) weight at the regional and global level, with major emerging powers challenging Western dominance (Konijn, 2012: 1; Mawdsley, 2012: 4, 19). Within this group of emerging powers, and despite being mainly characterized by their differences, the BICS[3] have a set of interesting traits in common: they all have large and fast-growing economies, all are global or at least regional powers with their own geopolitical agendas, they all are (until recently) donor and recipient at the same time, they all are being counted as part of 'the South', none of them is a DAC member, and as a group they attract a lot of academic and political debate (Rowlands, 2012:633). **The BICS have been scaling up their South-South cooperation over the past decade, including with African countries**. One clear indicator is the **explosion in regional meetings and diplomatic exchanges**: since 2000, the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is held every three years, in 2006 and 2009 an Africa-South America Summit (ASA) took place, in 2008 the Indians launched an India-Africa Forum Summit, the India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum (IBSA) will be holding its third summit in 2013, and the BRICS summit held its fifth edition in March 2013. Following the money trail, the **increase in B(R)ICS' South-South resource flows clearly shows too**. For example, according to the Global Health Strategies Initiatives, the annual growth rates of BICS' foreign assistance between 2005 and 2010 varied between 8% for South Africa, 10% for India and above 20% for China, Brazil and Russia each (GHSi, 2012:7). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) (taking into account Russia and not South Africa) estimated that BRIC's foreign direct investment (FDI) to Least Income Countries (LICs) amounted to 1.7 billion euro in 2009, 40% of which was destined to Sub-Sahara Africa (IMF, 2011: 16). It also stated that: "*While industrial countries remain LICs' dominant development partners, LIC-BRIC ties have increased so rapidly over the past decade that BRICs have become new growth drivers for LICs. (…) Bilateral trade, which grew exponentially over the past decade, is the backbone of LIC-BRIC relations.*" (IMF, 2011: 6). A case in point is the steady build-up in Sino-African trade and investment flows during the 1990s and 2000s, making China Africa's largest trade partner by 2010.

Interestingly, in contrast to private sector and government, both prominent players in the burgeoning SSC, **civil society seems to be seeing much less action**. In mainstream western theory on development and governance, civil society is considered next to the state and the private sector as one of three indispensable and complementary actors guarding good governance,. As UNDP (1997: iv) stated: "*Governance includes the state, but transcends it by taking in the private sector and civil society. All three are critical for sustaining human development. The state creates a conducive political and legal environment. The private sector generates jobs and income. And civil society facilitates political and social interaction - mobilising groups to participate in economic, social and political activities.*" In line with this, traditional western donors have, since the late 1980s, invested a great deal of attention and funds in fostering civil

3 While normally Russia is included amongst the major emerging powers, it is also considered as an outlier when it comes to development cooperation (Rowlands, 2012:634, 642; Waltz & Ramachandran, 2010:11). In the light of its candidacy to the OECD, its recent overtures towards DAC, its lower involvement in Africa and it not being part of the South, it is not included in this analysis.

society in their partner countries, as part of the promotion of good governance and democratisation. OECD-DAC donors and partner countries reconfirmed the crucial role of civil society at the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2008 in Accra: in the final outcome document, the Accra Agenda for Action, they explicitly recognized civil society organizations (CSOs) as development actors in their own right, instead of merely contractors of donor priorities. They also emphasized the necessity of creating an enabling environment for civil society in developing countries (HLF3, 2008: 4). The strong involvement of civil society in mainstream DAC-driven development cooperation contrasts with the apparent lack of civil society engagement in SSC. This is especially true for cooperation with Africa, where mainstream development cooperation has even been critizised for bypassing and undermining state structures because of the strong reliance on CSOs. At the same time the activities of emerging powers, in particular in Africa, are prompting a hot debate, in which African civil society voices are rarely heard. One wonders: is African civil society missing in action?

3 | BICS' policy and practice on civil society inclusion in SSC

The **common BICS policy statements on SSC remain rather silent when it comes to the role of civil society.** The only explicit reference in all five final declarations of the BRICS summits combined, is one sentence stating that: "*We encourage expanding the channels of communication, exchanges and people-to-people contact amongst the BRICS, including in the areas of youth, education, culture, tourism and sports*" (Delhi Declaration, 2012: §48). Although this refers to interaction and exchange by actors beyond the realm of state or market, it is a far cry from recognizing of the need for organised civil society to get involved. In national policy documents on SSC, references to non-state and non-private sector actors are scarce as well. However, BICS differ on how they flesh out SSC: they emphasize different principles, modalities and sectors, and they have different (often still evolving) institutional set-ups (Rowlands, 2012: 638).

China's Africa Policy (2006) contained two brief pointers referring to cultural exchange (§3) and people-to-people exchange (§8). In it, the Chinese government resolves to "*guide and promote cultural exchanges in diverse forms between people's organizations and institutions in line with bilateral cultural exchange programs and market demand*" (China's Africa Policy, 2006: §3) and to "*encourage and facilitate the exchanges between people's organizations of China and Africa, especially the youth and women, (…) and guide Chinese volunteers to serve in African countries.*". The subsequent White Paper on China-Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation (2010) did not contain any such notions, but the White Paper on Foreign Aid (2011: 19) proposed to enhance people-to-people exchange by setting up a scholars and think thank cooperation. Interestingly the Beijing Declaration of the fifth Ministerial Conference of the FOCAC (2012) does state that China "(…) *will vigorously carry out the dialogue between Chinese and African civilizations, launch a new round of exchanges in culture, education, sports, tourism and other fields, and forge closer ties between the young people, women,* ***non-governmental organizations****, media organizations and academic institutions of the two sides, with a view to deepening the understanding and friendship between the people of China and Africa and promoting the diversity of the world civilizations.*" [Emphasis added] (Beijing Declaration, 2012: §16). To our knowledge this is the first explicit reference to a role for NGOs in its Africa policy.

The **limited policy attention for the role of CSOs in Sino-African relations seems to be put into practice too**. As yet, Chinese development actors in Africa have done little to acknowledge the relevance of Africa's civil society, and even less talked to its representatives. Meanwhile, most

African civil society actors share the sense of amazement about the recent growth of China's role in Africa, but have little information and even less avenues for dialogue. It is extremely hard to find any examples of cooperation between official Chinese development actors and African CSOs. However, Sino-African negotiations on cooperation do display a cautious positive trend in the integration of CSOs in Sino-African relations. The China-African Civil Society Dialogue in Nairobi in 2008 is often seen as a first important occasion in this regard. It was organized by Fahamu, one of the only Africa-based information services on political, developmental and social justice issues in Africa that has a consistent reporting on Chinese-African relationships. It brought together Chinese experts on Africa with African civil society representatives from 15 different countries and provided a first platform for exchange between them (Sievers, Marks & Naidu, 2010: 256). Another example of Sino-African relations opening up might be the growing importance of the China-African Think Tank Forum (CATTF) organized yearly. The forum is a high-end platform for academic exchange and ideological dialogue between China and Africa, and "*while sticking to the governing tenets of Civil Initiative, Government Support, Frank Dialogue and Consensus Building, CATTF aims to promote academic research, boost mutual understanding, and expand Sino-African consensus*" (Prof. Liu Hongwu cited in CATTF, 2012). During this year's meeting in October 2012 academics and government officials - the difference not always being clear - met to discuss "Chinese and African Common Interests: Current Issues and Future Perspectives in Governance, Peace and Security". Another intriguing initiative is the China-Africa People's Forum, which was organized for the second time in 2012. During its first meeting in Nairobi in 2011, the People's Forum adopted the Nairobi Declaration declaring that "*the partnership between Chinese and African NGOs has been formally established*" and also calling "*upon the Government of China and Governments of African nations to see the importance of people-to-people exchanges between the two sides*" (Nairobi Declaration, 2011). At the occasion of the follow-up meeting in July 2012 the participants called for the establishment of 'a new model for NGO cooperation' between China and African countries (Xinhua News, 11 July 2012), but information on the concretization of this intention is hard to find.

Indian policy documents are not very loose-lipped on the subject of collaboration with African civil society either. In 2008 the first India-Africa Forum Summit took place in New Delhi, resulting in two outcome documents: the Delhi Declaration and the Africa-India Framework for Cooperation. The first document does not pay any attention to African CSOs. The latter dedicates a small chapter on civil society but remains vague by referring shortly to cooperation with 'civil establishments' and 'institutes' (Africa-India Framework for Cooperation, 2008). The Second India-Africa Forum Summit of 2011 in Addis Ababa also led to the adoption of two documents: the India-Africa Framework for Enhanced Cooperation, which mentions the term 'civil society' without making any further notice to this topic, and the Addis Ababa Declaration which does not go much further than the phrase: "*We commit ourselves to involving the private sector and civil society in Africa and India to widen the scope of our partnership*" (Second Africa-India Forum, 2011; African Regional Coverage, 2011). This shows that India's policy related to economic and development cooperation with Africa also explicitly focuses on bilateral channels. At the same time it does seem to recognize the role of NGOs as a development actor that should be engaged by the development partner itself. This was shown for example by the following 2003 statement of Finance Minister J. Singh, delineating India's approach: *"(…) the Government of India would now prefer to provide relief to certain bilateral partners, with smaller assistance packages, so that their resources can be transferred to specified non-governmental organizations (NGO's) in greater need of official development assistance.*" (GOI, 2003: 21). While explicitly naming governments as the go-to development partner, India and Africa did commit "*to involving the private sector and civil society in Africa and India to widen the scope of our partnership*" (Addis Ababa Declaration, 2011: §28) at the latest Africa-India summit in 2011. So far examples of India linking-up with its own or partner country NGOs to channel development funding, or otherwise engaging civil society are rare (Mawdsley, 2012: 100). But it is interesting to see that in the past few

years the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported the development of different online networking websites, bringing together people from India and Africa. The project '!ndiafrica: a shared future' is such an example, with as stated aim "to complement the government to government and business to business initiatives, and to bring the people of India and Africa closer and help partner shape the future of these two geographies by engaging their youth" (www.indiafrica.in on 16/2/2013). Another interesting event was the Africa-India Academic Conference in Addis Ababa in 2011 on "Africa-India: a Partnership for Development and Growth" aimed among others at organizing cooperation between Indian and African academic institutions – which can be perceived as civil society- on five themes. Although civil society is not a theme as such, focus is put on "women as agents of change" and "capacity building for human resource development" (Nivedita & Sandipani, 2011).

Brazil and South Africa might be taking a different approach. Although the Brazilian model for international cooperation is mostly based on government-to-government arrangements, greater participation of civil society has been called for. According to Cabral & Shankland (2012: 17-18) signs of a growing awareness for the role of non-state actors in development cooperation are starting to show, with social movements being involved in some government-led projects, and with attempts to create a civil society forum for the community of Lusophone countries. How this trend will evolve and what role African CSOs might be given remains to be seen. Finally, according to Vickers (2012) the South African agency for development cooperation in the making will have the mandate to coordinate all outgoing international development cooperation as well as partnerships including with civil society (Vickers, 2012: 551). Their different stance on the role of civil society might be translated into the India-Brazil-South-Africa (IBSA), that takes a different approach to civil society engagement than the national Indian and Chinese policies. Several IBSA summits have taken place wherein not only governmental representatives but also a women's forum, academic forum and editor's forum were involved. The aim of the IBSA summits is to improve and deepen the relationship between the Indian, Brazilian and South-African societies and enhance people-to-people cooperation. The summits deal among others with social development and therefore emphasize the vital integration of civil society in decision-making and policy processes (IBSA, 2011).

All in all, there seem to exist **some cautious policy intentions for a more pronounced role for civil society in the BICS' international cooperation**, but it is unclear whether in each case 1) it is mostly, or only, rhetorical support; 2) it is a streamlined policy line shared by the different actors involved in the SSC of the country; and 3) to what extent it is or will be truly implemented. Anyhow, looking at the current state-of-play, different analyses seems to agree that civil society is only by exception involved in the practice of emerging power's SSC (Mawdsley, 2012: 102). This begs the question: **what are the obstacles hindering civil society engagement**?

4 | Why is civil society in 'time out'?

Looking for different explanations on the awkward relationship between emerging powers and the civil society in their African partner countries brings up two influential ideological issues: the conceptualization of civil society and the core principles of SSC.

4.1 Different/conflicting conceptualizations of civil society

Mainstream western theory traditionally takes a pluralist view on civil society and has often reflected on its value as a counterforce for state power and private sector. This is visible in the multiple theories that centuries of philosophers have developed on the definition, benefits and dangers of civil society. In Greek political philosophy Aristotle referred to a rule-governed society where the public good was placed before the private interest of the ruler (Kaldor, 2003: 2). Locke and Hobbes, on the other hand, in the 17th century accentuated the dangers of civil society, which they defined as the natural state of human beings. From their perspective a sovereign state is needed in order to confine the brutal excesses of society (Young, 1994). In the 18th century Ferguson and Paine (in Bratton, 1994: 53) were the first to give CSOs a role as social transformers, as they saw CSOs as an execution of the liberty of men. De Tocqueville (in Bratton, 1994: 53-54) followed the same line and argued that CSOs have to oversee the state, promote basic rights and strengthen democracy. Another interesting theory on CSOs has been developed by Hegel in the 19th century (Bratton, 1994). He warns for misuse and cooptation of CSOs by the state or economic elites. Interestingly these historical interpretations of CSOs are still relevant for contemporary studies on the role of CSO in development, but are sadly often overlooked. For instance de Tocqueville's theory perfectly aligns with the watchdog role of CSOs in modern typologies. In addition, Hegel's warning can be found in recent studies (Mohan, 2002; Putzel, 2002), arguing that CSO are neither free of political misuse nor elite capture.

Contemporary studies have a more policy-oriented take, but still the pluralist interpretation of civil society dominates. Edwards (2004: 2) accentuates the "fuzziness" of the term and gives a concise summary of the current debate about the role of CSOs. From the right, civil society has been applauded for its capability to diminish the role of the state and increase that of the market and individual agency, in this sense CSOs are primarily providers of services (Edwards, 2004). This approach can be situated in the 80s, characterized by the neoliberal discourse of Thatcher and Reagan and the International Financial Institutions (IFI's). CSOs were seen as an alternative to disappointing state performance in developing countries and a means to fill the social gap left behind by the Structural Adjustment Plans (SAPs) (Hadiz, 2004; Clayton et al., 2000; World Bank, 2010). From the left it has been portrayed as the motor for socio-political change (Edwards, 2004). This role has also been accentuated within the good governance agenda of the IFIs, which aimed at strengthening democracy in developing countries (Edwards & Hulme, 1996). Clayton et al. (2002: 5) conclude that "*the convergence of […] three, interlinked developments in developing countries -good governance agenda, NPM and state decline- has resulted in a massive increase in external funding for CSOs.*"

Mainstream western theories most often look upon civil society as an distinctive actor and force in sociey, and often combine this with an appreciation of the role of civil society as a (political) counterforce to state power. This contrasts with other interpretations of civil society, that consider challenging state power as not desirable and where civil society is in practice often used as an extension of the state apparatus (Whiting, 1991), as is the case for the Chinese civil society landscape. Since a policy reorientation towards building a 'harmonious society' and placing higher priority on social reform, China has seen an increased tolerance towards sectors outside government. Also, due to the rapid economic growth and the welfare gap this has created, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has sought the support of CSOs in order to provide its growing population with basic goods and services (Yuhua, 2010). This translated into more government recognition for the added value that civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can have in service provision and the mobilization of societal resources (Yongnian & Fewsmith, 2008; Tao, 2008; Béja, 2008; Yuwen, 2011). Yet, out of fear that CSOs might challenge government policy and undermine political stability, Chinese government keeps firm and effective control over CSOs. As a result Chinese CSOs often have a more (financially and

institutionally) dependent and more collaborative relation with the state (Lu, 2008; Yuwen, 2011). In response, CSOs have found ways to influence policy without engaging in 'naming and shaming' practices which contradict with Chinese traditions of keeping face at all times (Yazini; s.d.; Yuhua, 2010; Pambazuka, 2007). They adopted more pragmatic approaches, like structural dialogue and peaceful 'walks', which do not directly discredit the CCP and attempt to change policies incrementally (Yuhua, 2010; Gilboy & Read, 2008).

Looking at Brazilian and Indian civil society landscapes, they seem to belong somewhere on the continuum between the confrontational view and the cooperative view of civil society, incorporating aspects of both. In Brazil, CSOs tend to have dual role. They are both providers of basic needs and services as well as advocacy and watchdog organizations. The Brazilian government, as the Chinese government, has recognized the potential of CSOs for alleviating the negative side effects of rapid economic growth (de Souza, 1994). Despite a history of government interference in CSOs, most prominently in trade unions, the fact that Freedomhouse (2011) concluded that political rights and civil liberties are respected in Brazil might indicate the elbow room for CSOs is increasing. The impeachment of President Collor on corruption charges in 1992, lead by CSOs is a promosing example in this regard (de Souza, 1994).

Indian society is characterized by a vibrant and large civil society sector. It's origins can be found in the independence struggle and by now there is a multitude of organisations, movements and actors involved in various areas and adopting different approaches (Nayar, 2005). The state has, as in Brazil and China, incorporated NGOs as service providers since the mid 1980s, although they are perceived as junior partners implementing state programmes, they do bring the voice of the poor closer to government policy role and play an intermediary role in this regard (Clayton et al, 2000; Baviskar, 2005: 142). A part from these professionalised service delivery NGOs, India is characterised by well-organized social movements defending the rights of minorities and vulnerable groups and specific issues, such as environmental sustainability. These right-based and advocacy groups have been successful on many occasions in changing government policy. And in comparison with China leaves more room for these type of CSOs to emerge and challenge the government (Omvedt, 1993; Freedomhouse, 2011).

As this brief overview shows, civil society landscapes of different countries do differ and sometimes fundamentally so. This might be a partial explanantion for the limited role of civil society in SSC, especially in Sino-African relations. Actors on both sides lack knowledge of each other, and this also prevents them from knowing what added value rapprochement might bring. The outspoken political identity of civil society in different African countries as a watchdog or a promoter of bottom-up political participation may also be an obstacle. Linked to that, a mismatch in used tactics might bring an additional explanation: In traditional Chinese culture, to maintain face is vital for the government, as well as for individual citizens. The use of name and shame tactics by many African (and Western as well as international) CSOs risks having little effect and could alienate Chinese actors more from African civil society. Additionally, the privileged relationship between many African CSOs and Western donors, as well as accounts of corruption in CSOs have made China question whether African CSOs are a legitimate interlocutor to begin with (Obiorah, 2007).

4.2 Mismatch with SSC principles?

Another entry into a better understanding of SSC's reserve towards CSOs, is to look at its basic **rationale and discourse, which are distinctively different from the DAC-donor approach.** SSC departs from the idea that cooperation should not be driven by charity or power/dependency

relations. Instead the principles of equality, solidarity, the respect for national independence, sovereignty and ownership, mutual benefits (promoting win-win outcomes) and complementarity are key (Bilal, 2012: 27). These principles inspire the main policy positions: the commitment to non-interference in domestic affairs translates into cooperation without political conditionality. The quest for mutual benefits - and therefore reciprocity - means that in practice SSC is often done through mixed packages of aid, trade, investments and loans. The emphasis on equality leads to greater attention to partnership and exchanges of experiences, in particular through technical cooperation and knowledge transfer (Bilal, 2012: 27; Konijn, 2012b: 3-4).

SSC is **also being framed in a very distinct discourse**, different and to some extent explicitly opposed to the discursive of Western foreign aid. Despite the large heterogeneity in the group of Southern development actors there are some aspects within this discourse that they all seem to share. Mawdsley (2012:152) identifies four common elements: 1) A shared identity as 'developing nations', based on a shared experience of colonial exploitation, suppression or post-colonial inequality and present vulnerability to uneven neoliberal globalization; 2) The claim on specific expertise in appropriate development approaches or technologies, again based on a shared identity and in the own -bitter- experience with addressing similar development challenges; 3) A strong rejection of hierarchical relations in a fundamental attitude based on equality and respect for national sovereignty and for the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs.; 4) The insistence on win-win outcomes of SSC.

This principal and discursive background can - again partially - explain the dismissal of civil society as a legitimate actor. On the one hand because it could be seen as bypassing the government of a partner country and would therefore be in violation of the principle of non-interference in internal affairs. On the other hand because it would go against the sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit opposition against the Western discours and development model in which civil society, and in extension democracy, are put forward as crucial conditions for development. Again, especially in the Sino-African relations this could be the case. In line with the pivotal role the state is attributed in Chinese views on governance, China has been committed to a strict non-interference policy, making political conditionality and any actions undermining state sovereignty a 'no go' for its South-South cooperation. Yet, to what extent its specific views on civil society and its strict non-interference policy explain the current missing connection between China and civil society in its partner countries, and to what extent this is the result of an explicit policy choice, remains unclear.

5 | Discussion

Reconsideration of the current low profile of civil society in SSC could serve both emerging powers' and African countries' interests for a number of reasons. Firstly, different scholars place a very high importance on the role of civil society in maximising the potential of SSC and Sino-African relations in particular, as exchanges and understanding between cultures are highly important for building a peaceful relationship and world (Obiorah, 2007). Secondly, the similar interests of African and emerging powers' civil society in ensuring the equitable distribution of the benefits and opportunities arising from economic development could be a strong foundation for future cooperation and mutual learning (Tao, 2008). Thirdly, negative side-effects of BICS' private sector investments in Africa are receiving increasing attention and issues such as the impact on local producers or labor conditions in Chinese enterprises are triggering increasing criticism. This could be a breeding ground for an increasingly vocal opposition against the activities of emerging powers' enterprises.

It is to be expected that the debate on how African civil society can contribute to safeguarding national and individual interests, and a true win-win nature in the relations with emerging powers will increase. Emerging powers could therefore expect to be confronted with an increasingly organized, critical and vocal civil society on African soil.

Understanding what holds back mutual understanding, increased dialogue and rapprochement between emerging powers' government and civil society on the one hand and African civil society on the other is an important starting point for answering a key question: What role should civil society have in the future SSC, in order to contribute to governance, peace and security? A debate on the differences and consensus on the role of civil society and its place in a cooperation that has respect for sovereignty as its spil, both amongst CSOs as on government level is timely.

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